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SUBJECT: COUNSELOR ZELIKOW'S MEETING WITH QATARI FOREIGN MINISTER AND CHIEF OF STAFF OF ARMED FORCES

REF: DOHA 445

Classified By: Ambassador Chase Untermeyer for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[11.](#) (S) Summary. Department Counselor Dr. Philip Zelikow met with the Qatari Minister of Foreign Affairs, the Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces, and the Minister of State for Foreign Affairs March 20 to begin a strategic dialogue between the two countries, consult on Iran, and enlist support for decisive strategic investment in Iraq. The foreign minister, Hamad bin Jassim Al Thani (HBJ), agreed with Zelikow's analysis of Iran's objectives in the region and methods Iran is using to implement them. He said that Qatar is working with GCC states to develop a policy to address these difficult issues and will provide USG a proposal in the next couple of weeks, which will include a meeting for GCC ministers in the near future followed by a GCC-U.S. meeting. HBJ also outlined Qatar's idea to create a \$5 billion development bank for Iraq; he will send a study on the subject to the Counselor in Washington. Qatar is also considering a \$200 million micro-credit institution for the Palestinians.

[12.](#) Summary Continued. The Chief of Staff of the Qatar Armed Forces characterized bilateral relations as excellent in the military area but not as robust as they should be politically. The Counselor said the U.S. is ready to concentrate on the challenges the U.S. and Qatar must work on together. Two meetings with the Minister of Finance will be reported septel; refTel reports the meeting with Qatari Amir's consort, Sheikha Mozah. End Summary.

[13.](#) (U) Dr. Philip Zelikow met March 20 with Qatari First Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister to discuss regional security. Accompanying Dr. Zelikow were Ambassador Untermeyer, Rear Admiral Robert Moeller, NEA DAS Gordon Gray, EB Financial Economist Alexei Monsarrat, C Staff David Aidekman, and P/E Chief.

Iran

[14.](#) (C) Dr. Zelikow said that Secretary Rice had asked him to visit the region to advance a strategic dialogue on regional security as a follow-up to her recent meetings with GCC foreign ministers. The U.S. is now developing a comprehensive strategy toward Iran and needs to consult allies in the region. The Counselor explained that Iran's nuclear program is just one of many U.S. concerns with Iran which stem from the revolutionary nature of the Iranian regime and its violent, extremist agenda. Iran's primary objective is to push the U.S. out of the Gulf in order to pressure and intimidate regional governments. The U.S. seeks to counter the impression that the Iranian tide is surging while the American tide is ebbing. The U.S. hopes to work with Gulf states to utilize diplomatic, security, and economic strategies to counter the Iranian threat. A U.S.-GCC strategic dialogue should also focus on supporting moderation in Iraq through an international strategic investment compact outlining clear commitments for the new Iraqi government. It could discuss ways to reassure international energy markets about the possibility of any Iran-related supply disruption by examining options for stockpiling oil, increasing production levels, and protecting shipping. The U.S. and Gulf States also could engage in quiet, low-key discussions on security cooperation and planning. He said that countries of the region, which are facing some turmoil, have a choice to choose progress and reform or to seek revolutionary and violent change. Qatar has chosen the former path; terrorist groups and Iran have chosen the latter. However, the Iranian people primarily care about their domestic situation and for the most part do not share the Iranian government's desire to export revolution to the region. In Iraq specifically, the U.S. wants a country that is prosperous, independent, and secure, and which could be a strong partner in regional security. Iran prefers to have a weak, divided, and dependent Iraq as its neighbor.

[15.](#) (C) HBJ agreed strongly with Dr. Zelikow's analysis of Iran's motivations and goals, noting Iran's active support for subversive elements in Bahrain, Kuwait, Yemen, and eastern Saudi Arabia. HBJ added that while the Iranian public does not support the regime's foreign policy goals writ large, the U.S. should not underestimate the degree of

domestic support for the nuclear program based on a nationalistic agenda. Zelikow said he would like the GCC to take steps that will show Iran that it is not intimidated. He understood that Qatar might prefer to use the GCC forum to advance its security needs so as not to risk harming its sensitive relationship with Iran by acting unilaterally.

16. (S) HBJ said the GCC was ready to come forward and coordinate on regional security. Qatar is working with neighbors and meetings are happening that are not reported publicly. He believes that five GCC countries can get together at the ministerial level, including military representatives. Because Saudi Arabia has been problematic in the GCC, he doubts they would participate but believes the meeting can continue without them. Oman would be the right state to urge Saudi attendance. (NOTE: When Dr. Zelikow observed that the Omanis appeared to be acting friendly toward the Iranians, HBJ urged the Counselor not to make too much of this, noting that Oman is very worried about Iran. END NOTE) Following these initial internal discussions, the group would meet with a U.S. representative, possibly at HBJ's London residence, and possibly within the next month.

17. (C) HBJ had just returned from France, where he met with French PM Dominique de Villepin, whom he advised to maintain solidarity with the other permanent members of the UN Security Council. HBJ reported that he told the French that their diplomacy with Iran was not going well and it would be the wrong signal for the Iranians to find a gap in the Security Council.

18. (C) Dr. Zelikow said that in fact U.S. relations with France are in "harmony" on most issues. The British, French, and Americans have been aligned on the UNSC for a year. All three agree on the need for a serious policy toward Iran.

19. (C) HBJ said that the Iranian foreign minister was to come to Doha Wednesday, March 22. (NOTE: The foreign minister met with the Amir. END NOTE) "I still have hope that if they are pushed to the edge, they will do something" to end the crisis over nuclear enrichment, HBJ said. The Iranians don't want to destroy themselves or their long-term strategy for influence in the region. He said Qatar fears a military response, which "if not done cleanly," could result in retaliation against the nearest U.S. forces, i.e., those in Qatar. "I hope we don't reach this stage, and I don't recommend it," he said. President Ahmedinejad told HBJ in January that the Iranians "could make big trouble for the Americans"; HBJ said he advised Ahmedinejad against such a course of action.

Guatemala and UNSC

10. (C) Dr. Zelikow said he believed that Qatar would support Guatemala's UNSC candidacy over Venezuela. He said the U.S. appreciates the position as a great example of international harmony. HBJ confirmed Qatar's position, and other MFA officials told Embassy Officers that Qatar will support Guatemala, rather than fellow oil-producer Venezuela, because Guatemala had supported Qatar in its own UNSC bid. Zelikow mentioned some additional concerns about Venezuela's behavior. HBJ said he too had a skeptical view of President Hugo Chavez.

Concern About America's Image

11. (C) HBJ suggested that some U.S. foreign policies have damaged America's image. He noted that the climate in Europe was against the U.S. "A lot can be said or done differently," he said, so as not to aggravate allies while achieving the same results. Dr. Zelikow thanked him for this advice "from a friend" and noted that the U.S. was pursuing such a strategy on the Iran issue.

Need to Restart Regular, High-Level Dialogue

12. (C) According to HBJ, Qatar used to host an informal discussion with U.S. officials every six months in London, but the practice was discontinued. At Dr. Zelikow's request, HBJ said he would get in touch with A/S Welch and Zelikow in several weeks to discuss plans to re-start the dialogue. (NOTE: It was not clear whether this discontinued dialogue had involved all GCC States or just Qatar. END NOTE)

Iraq

13. (C) Dr. Zelikow said that we are facing a difficult time in Iraq but that we could get past it. It is important to form an inclusive government. There are qualified, dedicated

people, and if a good government is formed, we will need to take quick, decisive action to ensure that it has a good start. He observed that the idea of an "International Compact," such as Afghanistan's, was attractive; it would be a contract between the responsible Iraqi government and the international community that would assure donors of progress. Iraq will need financial assistance for the Compact, and he urged Qatar and other friends in the region to be ready to move decisively.

14. (C) HBJ said Qatar had evaluated creating a \$5 billion bank to invest in - rather than grant money to - Iraq's industries, such as oil, gas, and agriculture. The GOQ had commissioned a study with the Bahrainis and Citibank, which HBJ promised to send to Dr. Zelikow. The Iraqi financial expert who has charge of the proposal, Nemir Kidar of Investcorp, will be in New York shortly and HBJ will ask him to travel to Washington to brief U.S. officials on the idea.

Let Hamas Make its Choice

15. (C) Hamas came to power by elections, HBJ said. They will come around slowly. Either they will fail or they will deliver, which would require engaging Israel. "We advised them to let Abu Mazen deal with the Israelis," he said. Although the GOQ supported Hamas's legitimacy, Qatar will not transfer cash. Qatar is committed to paying \$3 million monthly to the Palestinian Authority for salaries; beyond that, there will be no cash transfers, the minister repeated. Qatar is discussing with former PA Finance Minister and now PLC member Salaam Fayyad the creation of a \$200 million micro credit facility. The Palestinians are clever, HBJ said; they will succeed in helping their economy and will have a low default rate. Qatar is also considering building hospitals or schools in lieu of providing cash.

Assistance to Lebanon

16. (C) For Lebanon, Qatar has donated 100 military vehicles and \$25 million for a new library. Qatar is also studying a real estate project that would relocate people from a blighted and dangerous area near the Beirut airport to a new location with prospects for growing a tourism industry. The project would cost about \$3 billion, but it would be to "make money and help people at the same time," the minister said.

Chief of Staff of the Qatar Armed Forces

17. (C) Dr. Zelikow and delegation met with Maj Gen Hamad bin Ali al-Attiyah, Chief of Staff of the Qatar Armed Forces. Al-Attiyah expressed a warm welcome and evaluated the relations between the two countries as good, especially on the military side. The Military Consultative Committee meetings in January went well, and liaison with the Embassy is excellent. The General was less positive about political relations, however. They started out well, at the start of the Iraq war, but then stagnated. Political ties are not as strong as the military ties.

18. (C) Dr. Zelikow said that there have been problems, but the U.S. has decided to concentrate on the strategic issues facing the two countries. His visit and that of U/S Hughes the previous month are evidence of this. He said he was not visiting to raise the subject of Al Jazeera. Instead, he wanted to initiate a serious strategic dialogue and obtain the views of senior level Qatari officials. "This is an important country, and we want to treat it that way," he said.

19. (S) We need this relationship, al-Attiyah said. We do not have such a defense agreement with any other country. We can play a big role in the region, in the war on terror, in helping to educate our people.

20. (S) Dr. Zelikow said that three issues are of great importance and indicate progress in our relationship. First is Qatar's attitude toward the terrorist threat. For example, there were concerns ten years ago about Qatar's relations with Khalid Sheikh Mohamed, and this shaped Qatar's image in Washington. People wondered if Qatar really cared about the threat. Second is national security. Qatar's hosting of U.S. forces counts for a lot with the President, and he doesn't take friends for granted. Third is reform. Qatar is taking decisions that will define the future of the country. Its decisions lead it down the path of reform and progress.

Qatar's Security Strategy

21. (S) Al-Attiyah outlined Qatar's security posture. Most

important is the defense agreement with the U.S. For internal security, a joint Defense-Interior force of 2,000 men has been set up and trained. For external security, Qatar is trying to establish a "security shield" consisting of radar and other technology to detect infiltration. He discussed the "GCC belt" with the Gulf Cooperation Council countries that is a link of radar and communication systems. But he said Qatar's small military could not repel an attack from a powerful country like Iran. He expressed the view that the GCC was the proper mechanism for improving regional security.

122. (C) Al-Attiyah discussed the GCC Peninsula Shield. Qatar was not happy with having radar only in Saudi Arabia and voiced its concerns. Saudi Arabia did not accept the point that the Shield should also respond to threats such as Iran. It feels secure. This tension has led to the Shield's possible disbandment, but until now there has been no solution.

123. (C) Along lines identical to his meeting with the Foreign Minister, Dr. Zelikow said that the U.S. is working on a comprehensive policy toward Iran, not just on the nuclear issue. He discussed Iran's revolutionary foreign policy and its tools of subversion and terrorism. We want to help the GCC to be effective, he said.

124. (C) Al-Attiyah said Qatar was helping the effort on Iraq. Qatar will train 40 military officers and soldiers in diving and security techniques and has invited the Iraqis to the Eagle Resolve domestic security exercise. But it is difficult for the Iraqis to send people outside the country for such training.

Minister of State for Foreign Affairs

126. (C) At a lunch he hosted for the delegation, Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Ahmad bin Abdullah al-Mahmoud expressed Qatar's concern about Iran's nuclear program and said the GCC was not prepared to face it (echoing statements by HBJ). The minister spoke in some detail about relations between Saudi Arabia and Qatar. He noted that the Kingdom has supported plotters of a coup against the Amir in 1996. (NOTE: The attempt was a counter-coup to restore the rule of Khalifa bin Hamad Al Thani.) More recently, Saudi Arabia blocked a gas pipeline deal with Kuwait and a causeway to the United Arab Emirates; in the case of the pipeline deal, Prince Saud bin Faisal's denial that the Kingdom had received a request to transit Saudi waters particularly infuriated the Qataris. "There is no trust," al-Mahmoud said with apparent agitation. He also noted that Saudi Arabia had failed in its promise to provide "good offices" in the now-settled territorial dispute with Bahrain, which, due to a lack of other options, was reviewed by the International Court of Justice; the ruling was in Bahrain's favor.
UNTERMEYER